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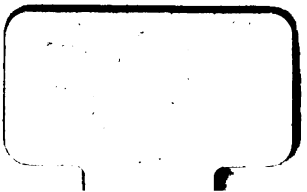

Narcissus
And Other Poems

By

Grace Denio Litchfield

Author of "In the Crucible," "The Moving Finger Writes," "Mimosa Leaves," etc.

G. P. Putnam's Sons
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CONTENTS

	PAGE
NARCISSUS	1
A BIRTHDAY SONG	40
THE HIDDEN BROOK	42
THE BEND OF THE ROAD	43
ENNUI	45
WERE I YON STAR	46
IN THE FORUM OF JUSTICE	48
IN AN ECLIPSE	49
THE CLOSED DOOR	50
CAGED	51
A SONG OF THE SUNRISE	54
INTO MY LIFE SHE CAME	56
LIKE A GARDEN OF MARVELLOUS MIDSUMMER BLOOMS	57
THE SETTING SUN	59
SEMELE TO JUPITER	60

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NARCISSUS

IN days whose memory the heart yet stirs,
As when at passing breeze o'er forest firs
The whole deep wood melodiously thrills,
There lay within the hollow of three hills
A tiny slumbering lake. Its curvèd edge,
Beyond the whispering rush and nodding sedge,
Was cushioned close with moss more silken soft
Than the enchanted couch whereon, so oft
As winter slew the flowers, Adonis slept,
Re-dreaming spring while Aphrodite wept.
Oaks, broad-limbed as Dodona's magic trees
Or the sacred groves of the Eumenides,
Arboured the sward, their branches, dense as those
That hid the blinded exile from his foes,

So blent in intertwinings manifold
That when noon bathed their crests with fluent gold
The green net held it fast, save where a few
Bright drops, some loose mesh favouring, broke through
Upon the dusk, as once on Danae's night
The god of all rained down in drops of light.
Under dew-broidered webs—each morn new-spun
Fair as Penelope's by night undone—
Over the velvet floor, as yet untrod
By hoof of satyr or by foot of god,
A myriad small things crept in and out,
And happy little sounds were all about.
White moths and butterflies on rainbow wings
Crossed and recrossed with fan-like flutterings.
Bees blundered dizzily from blooms to blooms,
Distraught with proffered sweets. Through drowsy glooms
Snakes stretched their jewelled lengths in lines of light,

Harmless as lizards. In the leafy height
Above, the birds, a Bacchanalian crew,
Held rapturous carousal. Drunk with dew,
The lark forgot to soar. The nightingale
Forgot lost Itylus and Procne's tale,
Forgot all else but love. The hunted swallow
Forgot to fly. The hawk forgot to follow.

Guarding this goodly spot three peaks rose up,
Enclosing it as in a jacinth cup
Laid o'er with emeralds. Their lifted brows
Were first to signal when Tithonus' spouse
Stood in the east with sleepy lids dropped low,
Were last to let the golden glory go
When, at day's finish, from his dazzling car
The bright god leaned and flung the reins afar
From off his smoking steeds. And when night fell
Sable and silent over hill and dell,
And noiseless through the iron gates and through
The gates of ivory false dreams and true

Stole earthward, while old Somnus far away
Stirred in his poppied sleep and silence lay
Around him as a flame lies round the thing
It feeds on, through the darkness towering—
Near neighbours to the stars, and royally
Invested in the midnight's majesty—
Ossa on Pelion, the peaks looked down,
Wearing the silver moonlight for a crown.
And when in anger or unholy mirth
Jove loosed his blazing tempests on the earth,
And Æolus at his great lord's command
Sent his wild brood hallooing up the land
With all the furies following in their track,
The peaks, defiant, hurled Jove's thunders back
And met his bolts unmoved.
There lay the lake,
Green-cradled between banks of fern and brake,
Crooned to by mother-birds the whole glad day.
Still as an unawakened soul it lay,
As slept Endymion beneath the moon

NARCISSUS

When Dian's matchless kiss bequeathed the boon
Of dreams immortal and immortal youth
Freed evermore from touch of Time and Truth.
Deep were its waters, and as crystal clear
As on child's cheek the yet unsalted tear;
So satin smooth the radiance of its face,
The shadows, glancing, seemed to hang in space;
And blue it was as blue of twilight sky
'Twixt birdsong time and startime, when on high
Throbs Hesperus, a sparkle of wet gold—
Eve's single gem, caught edgewise in a fold
Of her loose robe—and in the moment's hush
The round full silver flute note of the thrush
Breaks jubilant upon the breathless air,
Calling the world to ecstasy of prayer.

Nor lore nor legend yet the hollow had,
Its haunts unknown to nymph or oread.
No faun with pointed ears peeped through the trees:

NARCISSUS

Among the reeds no Pan piped melodies.
Fed by the cool inrush of mountain streams,
The lake lay given over to its dreams,
Dimpling with pleasure when light summer rains
Danced o'er its silvery surface, scarce at pains
To furrow its smooth brow when harsh winds blew
And high o'erhead the screaming storm-gulls flew.
Serene it mirrored all it knew of heaven—
The sun by day, the moon and stars at even;
Or if no light was, drew the darkness down
And wore it like a cloak of eider-down,
Nested as nest the birds, head under wing,
Happy and sure, dreading not anything.

Hither, one day, Narcissus came, chance-led,
Tracing a truant streamlet to its bed.
Deep ran the indented channel, boulder-strewn,
Athwart a tangled forest maze unhewn
Since time began. Adown it dashed the brook :

Now leaped the rocks and high above outshook
A cloud of snow-white plumes: now smoothed itself
To limpid glass beneath a granite shelf:
Now slipped impetuous twin banks atween,
A tossing ribbon, spun of froth and sheen
In all the tints that Here's messenger
Flaunts in her arching veil of gossamer—
Here dappled green where gracious willows grew:
Here, where the sky laughed down, a lucent blue:
And here, where sunny leaf-flecked shallows spread,
Amber and blended browns, with glints of red
From Earth's bared veins. And as it flowed, it sang.
The forest with the rippling music rang.
Never Pactolus o'er his sands of gold
More merrily his yellow waves unrolled,
Nor sweeter sang Alpheus, when at last,
O'erta'en and conquered, Arethusa cast
Her lot with his. So, singing, through the wood
The streamlet ran, proclaiming life is good.

Thus lured from step to step, charmed ears and eyes
Full fed with beauty, on his high emprise
Narcissus came. As toward the eternal light,
Divined in darkness and primeval night,
The blind grub crawls, dreaming of unknown wings—
As toward the restless sea the river springs,
Albeit, born mid solitary snows,
Nothing it kens save silence and repose—
So, led by a dim instinct in his blood
That hungered for the beautiful and good,
Narcissus, groping through the actual, sought
A vaguely limned ideal—at best caught
No more than fleeting glimpse of his desire
Flashed back upon him like the phantom fire
Of a spent meteor upon the night,
That, flashing, dies and leaves a trail of light
As if a god had passed. An alien
He moved among his mocking fellow-men,

NARCISSUS

An exile in a human wilderness,
Lonely with the enduring loneliness
Of the separate moon, uncompanied in heaven
Save for the clouds that cross her path, wind-driven:
The dark sad moon, though girt around with light:
The old cold moon, who to her own despite
May never, be it to her nearest lover,
That hidden frozen heart of hers discover.

So came Narcissus to the lonely lake
Among the isolating hills, awake
Or dreaming scarce he knew, so rare the spot
He stumbled on. The day was hushed and hot;
But cool and odorous the dusky place
Received him in its balmy-armed embrace,
Wooing to rest ere yet the need was. Down
He cast him on the emerald sod, where brown
And golden-lined the falling shadows lingered,
Loath to be gone. Caressing zephyrs fingered
His shining curls. Not softer was the kiss

Wherewith Amor woke Psyche back to bliss;
Nor whiter was the crest of Leda's swan
Than the young brow the tresses drooped upon;
Nor straighter-limbed was any cedar's span,
Nor fairer any form Olympian
Than his that lay supine upon the moss.
Blue were his eyes as caverned lakes, across
Whose vivid depths hope played like leaping flame,
And longing like a shadow went and came.
Now soft they closed, as flowers close at night;
As feathers fall, so fell his eyelids white.
And slow a sigh of peace stole 'twixt his lips,
A half-breathed note, as when a swallow dips
In swerving flight, and stirs the passive air
To silken sound.
Thus lay Narcissus there,
A fresh-culled lily dropped amid the green,
Fairer than any plucked by Proserpine
What time Dis found her, bosomed mid the flowers,
And gathered her to grace death's dreary bowers.

NARCISSUS

A stern old river god had fathered him;
A nymph his mother, peerless face and limb;
Half mortal, half immortal thus was born,
As, sooth, all sons of men, albeit shorn
In better part of their divinity
Through blind acceptance of a less degree,
Content to reach no higher than man's nature,
Who, an they would, might all be gods in stature.

Awhile Narcissus dreamed beneath the trees,
O'ermastered by a pleasantness of ease
That drugged his senses like an opiate;
Then woke to quickened consciousness, elate
When from a topmost bough a wee bold bird
Trilled to its nest, or when his fine ear heard
The whispered rustle of a bee-swung leaf,
Or whir of fragile wings, where in relief
Against the light some gauzy thing took shape.
Pleasant it was to mark the gnat escape
The net it floundered on; to watch the moth

Breathe open and breathe shut ere trembling forth
To flirt its painted pinions in the sun;
Pleasant to see the little seedlings run
Like live things all along the tufted grass;
Pleasant to see the invisible breezes pass;
To see the thistledown, steered soft aside
From wrecking thorn and bramble undescried,
Sail on in billowy lightness o'er the swell
Of aerial seas. Pleasant the pungent smell
Of bruisèd balsams and of rain-wet roots,
The aroma of young leaves and spicy shoots;
Pleasant each subtlest scent and sight and sound
Within the whole wide wood's idyllic round.
And in the appealing beauty of the spot
Narcissus his life-loneliness forgot,
Alone no longer in a solitude
Graced with such gifts in royal plenitude.
For kind as knight to damsel in distress
Is Nature, to who seeks her large caress.

But now the lustrous day waned toward its close.
And slowly, like thin mountain mists, uprose
The laid-by ghosts of thought, again to vex
Narcissus' soul with problems, and perplex
With haunting wonders. Wherefore was it given
To mortal to conceive himself a Heaven,
Yet win no nearer to his goal? Oh, sweet
Beyond all earthly sweetness, and complete
Beyond all earth's perfections, his ideal!
The beautiful to be the only real,
The good the only truth, truth life's one aim.
Who could the splendour of such hope defame,
Brooking a lesser glory—be content
With any excellence less excellent
Than the supremely best? Yet, though one search
The world o'er, doth some blemish not besmirch
The whitest soul, mar the divinest face?
Who dare show all his heart, nor court disgrace?
Doth any lift at noon, unstained, untorn,
The spotless standard he upraised at morn?

Doth any bring from battle blade as bright
As that he erst unsheathèd for the fight?
Who steers his puny skiff through wind and storm
Unharmed to port? Alas! The high gods form
In ranks above, and watch with cruel laughter
Each bark set sail, knowing what shall be after—
A broken helm, dragged anchor, drifting oar.
Who pilots soul so shipwrecked to the shore?
The struggle over, death's black current sweeps
Each down where Hecate in loathing steeps
From flowerless weeds the odious rank wine
That slakes forever thirst for the divine.
And there in Lethe's level-flowing stream,
Lost is the last faint glimmer of his dream.

Thus ran Narcissus' thought in darkening lines,
As shadows lengthen when the day divines
Approaching night. And as the moonlight fails

When shredded clouds, like shallops with blown
sails,
Drift darkling o'er the silver of its track,
So loneliness upon his heart crept back
In broken gusts of feeling, till at last
The whole sky of his soul was overcast.
No Pylades he reckoned mid his friends
To match him pulse by pulse. Affection ends
Where fear begins, and he who climbs too high
Must climb alone. O'er-earnest was his eye,
O'er-grave his smile, o'er-weighed with thought his
speech.
No comrade of them all aspired to reach
To his soul's height, nor willed to understand
The import of his spirit's stern demand.
"Youth," said they, "is the heyday time of flowers.
Leave age the gathering of simples. Hours
Compact of bloom and light and melody,
Pertain to Pan and to Terpsichore.
When Pan's pipe shivers, when the dead leaf falls,

When from the naked bough the gaunt crow calls,
When fitful gales scream down the withered hills,
And from the mountain blows the blast that kills,
When Nature is grown hollow-cheeked and haggard,
With faded smile and heart-beats faint and laggard,
Then may we meditate with likelier reason
Themes that in glowing June are out of season.
Now," said they," is our June-time. Fare thee well.
We leave thee for warm banks of asphodel.
Thou, with thy Circe face and Pallas tongue,
Dream on as liketh thee."

So mocking flung
Each one his word, and singing turned aside.
He had not lonelier been an he had died.

" 'T is spring time, 't is wing time,
The whole world 's in motion;
'T is sing time, 't is swing time
From ocean to ocean!
The grasses salaam; the reeds titter and nod;

Every zephyr that blows is the breath of a god.
Every leaf is a-curtseying, each to its neighbours,
The moss-banks are waving their delicate sabres.
The luminous ether drops bird-notes like dew
From the glimmering, shimmering, palpitant blue.
The clouds are white eagles that fly toward the sun.
The brooklets are ground-larks that sing as they run.
Oh, 't is May time, 't is play time!
The whole world 's a riot—
A joyous disquiet
Of sunbeams that flicker, of water that heaves.
Pan, Pan from the rushes is piping 'Come hither!'
The swallow swoops downward: 'Oh, whither? oh, whither?'
And 'Thither!' the faun from the forest cries: 'Thither!'
And Dryope laughs through her leaves.
Oh, 't is dove time, 't is love time!
The whole world is mating.

NARCISSUS

E'en Dis on his throne in the dark under zone
Is a-weary with waiting,
A-weary with comfortless flowerless night,
And has snatched him a bride from soft regions of light.
E'en Dian o'er Latmos leans low from the cloud,
In the white of her magic love's dreams to enshroud.
E'en the wind-footed maid falters thrice as she flies,
To lift the gold apple shall make her love's prize.
E'en Daphne, a-quiver through all her young boughs,
Sighs faintly: 'Alas for the unfulfilled vows!
Apollo! Apollo! Apollo!'
Creation 's ablaze with the one flaming fire:
Athrill with one passion, one burning desire.
Love calls from the hilltop, Love calls from the hollow,
' 'T is spring time, 't is wing time,
'T is dove time, 't is love time,
Oh, follow! Oh, follow! Oh, follow!'"

Amid the careless crowd were some forsooth
Knew no disfavour toward the beauteous youth.
Full many a nymph had wooed him, though for naught;
And Echo, loveliest of them all, distraught
For love of him, as true as Clytie,
As fleet of foot as Lelaps, sure as he,
And more untiring than Alectryon,
Wherever led Liriope's lone son
Followed upon his footsteps undeterred,
Though never backward glance he gave, nor word.
Weeping and smiting her bare breast she went,
On him who pressed before her gaze attent.
Her eyes, tear-brimmed as anguished Niobe's,
Were midnight stars, mirrored on midnight seas.
So slight her form she scarce a shadow cast;
It seemed a ray of light shone where she passed.
Her footfall left the dew upon the blade,
Left whole the cobweb's labyrinthine braid,
Met neither prick of stone nor thrust of thorn.

Soft as the silken tassel of the corn,
And yellow as the glittering Golden Fleece,
Her bright hair, falling, veiled her to the knees.
Medusa's locks burned not with richer flame
Ere Pallas smote their glory into shame.

Certes no lovelier nymph in earth's demesne,
Nor sweeter, sued for love. Yet never quean
Less guerdon won for unsought heart's full dole,
Nor paid in costlier coin Love's unjust toll.
Silent she went as image carved in stone,
Voiceless since one dread day not far agone
When Here, the implacable in hate,
Avenging some poor slight shown her estate,
Took from the maid birthright of speech at will,
Decreeing she her smitten years fulfil
Dumb as the dead, save if one spake. Then must
She, stooping, lift his last word from the dust,
Whate'er it be, and call it o'er and o'er
Till her breath fail her, and she can no more.

Cruel, O goddess, thine adjudged award
For that sweet tale that held thee from thy guard
With soft-tongued nothings all of half a day,
The while thy lord pursued his unwatched way!

Thus, on an eve whereof this seemed the fellow—
So soft its shades, its dripping lights so mellow—
Narcissus, unaware of her who followed,
Once roamed the woods. A rushing torrent hollowed
Here a ravine, along whose rock-strewn crest
Idly he wandered, every sense at rest
In a charmed peace of chosen solitude
That left no room for cognizance of mood,
Nor unfulfilled desire of anything.
Sudden a homing bird on scarlet wing
Splashed through the green and swooped upon his sight.
Impelled, he bent his gaze to note its flight;
So heard a breath, so saw an aspen stir,

So caught a gleam from golden hair of her
Who, still leaf-hidden, breathless where she stood—
A slim wild thing within a wilder wood—
Waited for sign from him as from a god.

Swift anger took him, and he stamped the sod
Like one entrapped. The solitude despoiled,
Comradeship unelect thrust on him, foiled
The hour's magic. Irked by his vexation,
He strode on, glooming. She, in strange elation
That stayed her trembling limbs up like a crutch,
Stept unseen after, till, teased overmuch
By conscience of some creature lurking there
With eyes that drank his movements as a hare
Drinks sound, he swept about, all measure lost,
His beauteous head thrown high, his curls back tost.
"Speak! Who is here?" quoth he.

Forth from the wood
She crept, obedient, and drooping stood.
"Here," breathed she back. And then again:
"Here. Here."
And once again, faint as a falling tear,
"Here." Dazed, abashed, with suppliant eyes aglow,
Stood so before him, white as driven snow,
Her gold hair all about her like a cloud,
Her tender hands outstretched, her bright head bowed.
So Semele, before the blasting splendour
Of fire-crowned Zeus, did her weak soul surrender.

But wrath held the young heart of him in bond.
Too angered to show pity or be fond,
Rudely he flung at her: "Why followest me?
Whom seekest thou, I pray thee?"
"Thee!" cried she,

And faltered to her knees, wet eyes adoring,
Wan arms upraised, the whole bent form imploring.
"Thee! Thee!" And once again, as soft, as low
As dropping flake upon new fallen snow,
"Thee!"
Yet more rough his speech. "By all above me,
No bolder couldst thou be an didst thou love me!"

She quivered like a leaf on shaken tree.
Across her brow a flame rushed scorchingly.
"Love me," she whispered, helpless. "Love
me—me."

As from beyond a separating sea
The murmur floated to his heedless ear,
A prayer fit only for kind Heaven to hear
For depth of pain and passion it confest,
Her whole soul-life within the word comprest.
His look was as a knife-thrust in her heart.
Scornful he laughed: "Nay, prithee, stay apart!

I love not thee nor any. So farewell,"
And broke aside and plunged within the dell
Whose depths received and hid him from her sight.

Her body could no more her will requite.
Her feet refused to follow. Her dimmed eyes
Denied their service. Forest, rocks, and skies
Fell into chaos. Like a broken flower,
Too rudely blown on in a stormy hour,
She drooped upon herself, vanquished, undone.

As drowns the moon in glory of the sun,
As melts the outblown foam upon the seas,
As fades the drifting perfume on the breeze,
As pales the bow on heaven's stupendous blue,
So her great love her fainting spirit slew.
" Farewell. Farewell," once and again she sighed:
Then prone upon the sward sank down and died,
And where she was, was nothing, save a mist

Exhaling on the ether. All earth list
With a quick inward-taken breath. "Farewell,"
Like the last quiver of a ceasing bell
Came floating downward, and her soul passed on—
A sob among the hills—and so was gone.

As traversed roads seen through an autumn haze
Shut on returning vision, so those days,
Misted by memory, now dimly caught
And loosely held Narcissus' roving thought.
Love him beseemed some lustre yet to come—
Some greatness should strike lesser honours dumb—
A splendour beyond passion, beyond sense,
Surpassing all conceived magnificence.
Wherefore, to dally with or love or faith
Of slighter worth, were but to love Love's wraith.

Thus mused he, his swift fancy soaring higher
And higher as on lark-wings of desire,

Till in the infinite, as in the blue
The mounting bird dissolves upon the view,
His spirit lost itself.
Scarce sentient lay
His body thus, till by the close of day
Thirst whispered him. Awaked to fleshly needs,
He gazed around, half lifted from the weeds.
A holy hush suffused the temperate air;
Peace, like a written word, lay everywhere.
The birds were still. No tiniest breeze was playing.
The leaves hung lax, like hands down dropped from praying.
Pale gold the sky: pale gold the lake: pale gold
The light wherein the woods were cloaked and stoled
As had the hour invested all creation
For one supernal act of adoration.
And the vast silence was as music. Thrilled
With harmonies empyrean, it filled
All space with soundless song. No living speech

To so impassioned utterance could reach.
And now for very bliss day swooned to death,
Pouring his heart out in a blood-stained breath,
And Heaven stooped to gather in his soul.

With awe Narcissus watched from pole to pole
The burning splendour spread, until again
Thirst called to him, insistent, like a pain.
"E'en so," thought he, "my thirst for the ideal
Is yet to find assuagement in the real.
Some victor hour high Heaven shall give reply:
My soul must come into its own, or die."

Recumbent still, along the pliant grass,
To where the lake lay like a thing of glass,
His supple limbs he drew with lissome grace,
Till o'er the brink he bent his perfect face,
"To all the gods I drink," devoutly said,
And to the gleaming surface stooped his head.

NARCISSUS

Lo! as he bent above the golden sheen,
A face, young, exquisite, rose up between
His thirsting lips and the clear depths below.
As sudden sun on field of frosted snow,
So dazzling on his sight the vision broke,
And in his breast tumult of joyance woke.
Aside he crept, bewildered at such blaze
Of beauty, and afeared lest neath his gaze
It flee affrighted, as once Eros fled
When glance too curious was hazarded
On his fair godhood. Vain the trembling pause!
Back the lake drew him as a magnet draws.
And lo! again the face, its radiant eyes
Fixt on him in a wonder of surprise
And questioning. Not fairer e'en was he
By jealous Zephyr slain, nor fairer she
Born whitely of sea-foam on billowing crest.
Oh, beauty past belief—Creation's best—
Faultless of form, instinct with faultless soul—

Perfect in one incomparable whole!
All his own lofty longings looked at him
From those deep eyes. All his ideals dim
And vague and exquisite, here realized,
Informed with lovely life he recognized.
Scarce drew he breath for rush of ecstasy.
Each high and godlike possibility,
Enfolded in the soul as is the flower
Within the bud, in that revealing hour
Divinely dawned on him and held him mute,
As waits the unsung song within the lute
The liberating hand.
A moment yet
He dallied with enchantment. Then, beset
By marvel, breathed, "Who art thou?" half in awe,
And as he spoke, his question spoken saw.
"Thine other self," he whispered down, and thought
The same soft syllables he answering caught.

Nearer he pressed. The vision came more near,
Ardent as he, as he, too, in sweet fear—
Gave back his look of high companionship,
His joy ineffable, from eye and lip,
Gave back his eager smile, his timorous grace,
Gave love for love in that brief instant's space,
Till he, thereat emboldened overmuch,
With cry triumphant closer stooped to touch
The lips so near his own; almost he felt
Their breath ambrosial in his own breath melt
As fragrance of two roses blends in one:
When ah! e'en as they met, the face was gone.

Confounded he leaped up. What swift disguise
Had some god lent to thwart him of his prize?
His searching glance swept lake and sky in wrath,
If haply trace were of the followed path.
"Fear naught, O Love!" he called. "Return!
Haste hither!"
He listened, tense. Reply came from no whither.

The widening rings across the water's breast
In burnished grooves ran toward the shining
west.
Pale gold the world, and Silence its high-priest.

Breathless he waited, his desire increased
Sevenfold by loss. But sudden, like a flame
Cut off, the daylight went, and darkness came
With velvet tread adown the hill's long slope.
And as a frost-touched flower fades, his hope
Shrivelled and fell. Then woke a little breeze
Within the wood, and stole from out the trees,
And touched as with a small forbidding palm
His wet cold cheek. There seized him an alarm
Futile and formless as a mist. Dismayed,
Incontinent he drew back to the shade
Of the friendly oaks as to a warm green tent,
So generously the courteous branches lent
Their shelter. There at last, soothed, comforted
By their benignant presence, his fair head

Pillowed upon their cushioned roots, he slept,
And in his dreams tryst with the vision kept.

Near and more near now came soft-stepping
night
O'er neighbouring hills of dusky malachite,
As dying day undid the eastern bars.
Her flying tresses braided with gold stars,
The rustle of her garment, loosely flowing,
Making a murmured music of her going,
Her languorous lids half closed, her slackening
hand
Dropping down dreams, slow passed she o'er the
land,
A perfume faint, miraculously sweet—
The breath of blossoms bruised beneath her feet—
Trailing like brume of incense after her;
And place and time became one wide deep blur.

Scarce had the Hours begun their matin flight

Across the skies, linked in prismatic light,
Scarce had the golden chariot emerged
From the vast trough where rose-clouds seethed and surged,
When, with the first bird-note that tuned the air
To tinkling sweetness, from his leafy lair
Narcissus came, hope born again with day.
A jewelled world before him glowing lay.
A carbuncle the bed where late he dreamed;
'Neath opal sky the lake an opal seemed;
The hills, translucent through soft moonstone mists,
Were glimmering sapphires and pale amethysts;
The forest boughs a mass of beryls swung;
A chrysoprase from every grass-sheath hung;
Onyx and sardonyx was Earth's bare crust,
And all the scintillant air was diamond dust.

Joy filled Narcissus' heart. Joy burst in song
From his glad lips. He threw himself along

The water's brim, half hidden in lush grass,
Conjuring Zeus to bring his dream to pass.
And straightway, from the east upon his right,
Came a young dove in iridescent flight—
Omen of good that Heaven assenting gave—
And he, exultant, o'er the placid wave
Leaned his bright head.
Ha! From the depths anew
It rose to meet him through the riven blue—
A star ascending! Sight so dear as this
Surpassed concept—lips pleading for his kiss,
Eyes mystic with unfathomable adoring,
Arms outstretched as his own were in imploring.
Surely such look Alcestis wore, re-given
From death to him whose love made all her Heaven.
An instant of transported recognition,
And lo! again it was not. What fruition
Of hope was this? Between his groping hands
The soft cool waters slipped like silken bands;

The tall weeds washed against his arms and clung;
The wet curls from his forehead dripping hung.
But vanished was the vision. Too elate
Had been his hope and too precipitate,
Snatching at bliss ere yet was due the wage.
Back fled he to his leafy hermitage,
Such grief upon him as was that which tore
Achilles when Patroclus was no more.
Not Phaeton from heaven more headlong fell,
Nor Icarus, to sorrow's deepest hell,
Than now Narcissus, till at last o'ercame
His passionate longing his defeat and shame,
And drove him to the water's edge once more.
There once again joy shook him to the core,
For there, as if, re-conquered by his grief,
Willing to grant him semblance of relief,
The dear face tarried for him, smiled on him
With joy commensurate, through eyes yet dim
With undried tears, more passionate, more tender,
Grown its expression of divine surrender,

More exquisite its rapture of devotion.
Intoxicate with answering emotion,
Moveless as marble image, dumb with bliss,
Fear-taught to caution, lest again he miss
The joy he grasped at, long Narcissus knelt
Bowed o'er the lake, nor thirst nor hunger felt,
Nor weariness, nor any selfhood knew,
Lost in the vision's ravishment.

So flew
Time by, if told in moments or in days
He reckoned not. Immovably his gaze
Was stayed upon the changing face below,
So full of noble longings and the woe
Of unattained desires, that last as first
Fled from his touch as were he thing accurst,
Till, acquiescent grown through slow despair,
He strove no more,and prayed but one mad prayer—
That day endure for aye. For light was life,
And darkness death—twilight a losing strife,
Where life and death did battle, and death won.

Sleep had abandoned him. From sun to sun
One gnawing care, one ravenous need alone
Sucked at his life—the need to make his own
The beauty featured in that haunting face.
Alas! doth Heaven accord to any grace
To win to the ideal through desire
Unfructified? Like torch to funeral pyre
Is aspiration without effort. He
Who rounds his faulted soul to symmetry,
Needs more than barren worship of the good
To re-create him to the shape he would.
Too late Narcissus, swooning o'er the lake,
Saw mirrored there what life had held at stake;
Saw written clear, those lovely lines within,
All he was meant to be and might have been;
Too late saw all his soul had lost of gain;
Too late saw sin in failure to attain.

Thus, goaded by vain longing, fled his strength
As flies the wind-lashed sand, till spent at length,

With piteous glazed eyes that saw no more
Fixt where the wave the abiding vision bore,
Soulless, insensate, conscienceless he lay,
A thing by Earth and Heaven cast away.
And days passed, with their sunbeams and their blooms,
And nights passed, with their stars and solemn glooms,
And still the gods were silent.

So died he,
For love of that which he had failed to be—
A soul all unfulfilled and incomplete.
And where he died, a milk-white flower, sweet
With unuttered and unutterable things,
Fruitless through Nature's many harvestings,
And bearing at its heart a burning flame,
Grew, and was called thenceforward by his name.

A BIRTHDAY SONG

OUT and away, my song.
The road is long ;
The time is short ;
For thou by break of day, my song,
Must reach thy port.
Hie through the night!
Catch thee a star-beam for thy steed.
Saddle and curb it to thy need
With diamonded light.
Bind the whole heavens to its feet,
Then leap into thy seat
And loose it for wide flight!
Joy be thy spur and love thy whip.
For ere the moon hath bent to lave
Her pallid forehead in the wave,

A BIRTHDAY SONG

Ere dawn rose-paints the mountain tip,
Ere light lies liquid on the bay
And palpitant above,
There, where my heart is, must thou be,
O song of mine, in lieu of me,
And gently lay
Thy little rhymes, all silver sweet
With tender greetings, at the feet
Of one I love
And shall love long.
Haste thee, oh, haste thee then, my song!
Near is the day.
Out, and away!

THE HIDDEN BROOK

SO flows my love along your life, O friend—
A whispered song, with neither break nor end,
Outbreathed wherever your dear footsteps tend.

Albeit you listen not, are not aware
Of any music throbbing on the air,
Still my full heart goes singing to you there,

Content, although the way be long to run
And closed forever from the moon and sun,
With emerald dusks and opal dawns all one,—

Content, content, if Heaven but grant this meed,
That you may drink in any hour of need.

THE BEND OF THE ROAD

OH, that bend of the road, how it baffles, yet beckons!
What lies there beyond—less or more than heart reckons?
What ends, what begins, there where sight fails to follow?
Does the road climb to heaven, or dip to the hollow?
Oh, what glory of greenness, what lights interlacing,
What softness of shadow, what bounty of spacing,
What refreshment of change—aye, what beauty Elysian
The sweep of that curve may deny to the vision!
Oh, my soul yearns for sight! Oh, my feet long to follow,

Swift-winged with sweet hope as with wings of a swallow!
Though lonely the way, void of song, void of laughter,
I must go to the end—I must know what comes after!

ENNUI

A WIDE bare field neath blinding skies,
Where no tree grows, no shadow lies,
Where no wind stirs, where no bee flies.

A roadway, even, blank and white,
That swerves not left, that swerves not right,
That stretches, changeless, out of sight.

Footprints midway adown its dust;
Two lagging, leaden feet that just
Trail on and on, because they must.

WERE I YON STAR

WERE I yon star whose silver ray
Turns dusk to day,
Lo, I would hide me till you came,
Then burst in flame
Athwart the darkness on your sight,
And die in light.

Were I yon rose whose fragrance rare
Scents all the air,
I would not blossom till the day
You passed this way,
Then pour my heart out in perfume
And die in bloom.

Were I yon lark whose sunny song
Sounds all day long,

WERE I YON STAR

Lo, I would hush me till you passed,
    Then wake at last,
Spread my glad wings out toward the sky,
    Sing once, and die.

IN THE FORUM OF JUSTICE

PASS. Pass. Pass. Thou hast had thine hour
To sow in and reap. Is it thistle for flower?
'T is the seed is at fault, though Jove's hand stayed
the shower;
Make way for thy comrade with double thy dower.

Halt. Halt. Halt. There was given thee grace
To begin with the best and their records efface
Had thy sandals been winged. Step down from
the race.
One swifter than thou art would run in thy place.

Cease. Cease. Cease. Thou hast had thy chance.
Must a Pallas attend thee, to ward off mischance?
Let fall thy vain weapon. A thousand advance
To rush on and conquer with thy broken lance.

IN AN ECLIPSE

WHENE'ER in the course of life's daytime
of doing,
While high overhead stands the sun,
The forced night of inaction, our footsteps pursuing,
Bids halt, though our best be undone,
Oh, then, if we faint not for grief or surprise,
All the stars that we steer by will show in God's
skies.

THE CLOSED DOOR

KNOCK! Knock! Bide not there baffled with
spent hand.
Lo, here the threshold of thy dreamed-of goal—
Here, here, fulfilment for thy seeking soul.
Oh, knock! Oh, knock! Take not thy craven stand,
Stilly consenting, with Fate's beggared band,
Mulcted for ever of thy rightful dole.
Grasp for thy drop from Life's abundant bowl—
Thy meted morsel of the Promised Land!
The touch withheld, how shall the latch unlock?
What hostel proffers to unchallenging guest
Friendship's full feast—Wisdom's consummate
wine?
Fool! For a lifted finger all were thine—
All, all thy soul could compass at its best.
Knock, that the door may open! Knock, oh,
knock!

CAGED

IT was born behind bars, but it knew it had
wings,
And it felt God had meant it for happier things;
And it sang of the joys that it never had known—
Of fetterless flights over fields flower-strown:
Of the green of the forest and gold of the wheat:
Of the thrill of the tree-top, just touched by its
feet:
Of the feel of a lily-leaf, brushed by its breast,
And the splash of a raindrop, caught on its crest.
It sang of the beauty, the rapture of flying,
The palpitant air to its heart-beats replying,
Naught over, naught under, save limitless blue
And the music of wing-strokes, rhythmic and true.
It sang, and men said that its song was good;
But not one understood.

Then they brought in a wild bird, entrapped in a
snare,
And a day and a night held it prisoner there.
And a night and a day, unbelieving, distraught,
With impassible fate for its freedom it fought,
Though it bled at the breast blindly beating the
bars
As if strength of desire should force way to the
stars.
And men pitied, and said: It was free its life long;
Who could bid it endure but a day of such wrong?
And they flung wide the door, and the bird,
flashing through,
Swept away, like a leaf in a gale, from their view.

Then the other, behind the closed bars of its
fate,
Once again sang its heart out—its need, co-create,
Of the Broad and the Boundless. In passionate
song

It besought men to right for one day its life's
wrong—
To bestow for a day, or for one only hour,
The leave to make proof of its God-given power;
For one hour only to float on free wings
In the world where its soul lived—the world of
best things,
Of commensurate effort and gain, of desire,
Unlinked from despair, mounting higher and
higher
Till lost in attainment—the world of clear visions,
True measures, high aims, and untrammelled
decisions—
The world God had made it for. So its song rose,
Ecstatic, tumultuous, thrilled with wild woes
And delicious complainings, until the last note
Broke off in an exquisite cry in its throat.—
And men listened, and said that the song was
good.
But not one understood.

A SONG OF THE SUNRISE

THE night breaks. The light shakes
Down from the sky.
The darkness trembles: shivers, dissembles:
Unwilling to die.
And facile and fleet, on dusky feet,
Out of the dripping sunlight tripping,
Shadows pass by,
All sprinkled and spattered
With golden rain,
All shivered, all shattered, like dream-ghosts scattered
By the waking brain.

The light dawns. The night mourns
And the stars shiver.
The moon pales. The loon wails
Far down the river.

And strong in the might of perfect delight,
Fearless and bold with its wealth of gold,
    Stronger than sadness,
    Brighter than gladness,
    Mad with the madness
        Of victory won—
Above night's gloom, above life's bloom,
Higher and higher, like a passioned desire,
To the highest height of earth's blinded sight
        Rises the sun,
        And the battle is done.

    Yet afar, unforgetting,
        Hid by the hill,
    Night awaits the day's setting,
        Revengeful and still.

INTO MY LIFE SHE CAME

INTO my life she came
One golden day,
Softly, as blossoms come
Into the May.
I only knew that she was there
By the fragrance in the air.

Into my heart she came
One day of days,
Stilly, as on night's dark
God's stars outblaze.
I only knew that she was there
By the glory everywhere.

LIKE A GARDEN OF MARVELLOUS MIDSUMMER BLOOMS

LIKE a garden of marvellous midsummer blooms
In a tangle of twilights and sunfloods and glooms—
A riot of raptures in scarlet and blue
With blisses of purple and gold breaking through—
A temple to passion, with mossbanks for stairs,
And colours for anthems, and perfumes for prayers,
Where all longings, all dreams, all desires that be
Exhale in the breath of each blossoming tree,—
Such, O Love, is my heart's love—my heart's love
for thee!

Like a mist, fallen soft as a sleep o'er the land,
A peace all-compelling, too vast to withstand,

Wherein dreams lie undreamed and all prayers rest
unspoken—
An impalpable hush from man's own heart evoken,
Holding passion and sense in divinest control
By the touch of God's finger laid white on his
soul—
A holiest calm, a supreme ecstasy
Where heaven begins and earth ceases to be,—
Such, O Love, is my soul's love—my soul's love
for thee!

THE SETTING SUN

ONE radiant outflash of surpassing splendour,
And with the perfect peace of self-surrender,
Without a tear,
Without a fear,
Like some high spirit summoned from our sight,
The sun steps down into the unknown night.

458153

SEMELE TO JUPITER

O LOVE, divinely terrible, aloof! aloof!
Of a weak earthly loom is spun my heart's frail woof.
In mercy veil thyself. Naught but the eagle's eye
May look unblinded on the sun's whole majesty.
Give me not all I asked! Thy full magnificence
Reserve for heaven alone. Beware earth's impotence.
Smitten with too much splendour as with too much pain,
My spirit slips its leash. Oh, vain prayer, prayed in vain!
Withdraw thy glory! Lo, I sink upon the sod.
Love but as mortals love! Love not as loves a god!

MAR 29 1912.

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MAY 9 1912